

posts and entrenchments, but, finding no enemy, returned on the 25th.

7. The enemy having temporarily succeeded in eluding us, it was of the utmost importance to strike any of his forces that remained within our reach. I had always anticipated that, should the enemy choose to abandon El Arish, his line of retreat would be through Magdhaba and Abu Aweigila towards El Auja. These anticipations were confirmed by the report of the Royal Flying Corps that an enemy force of about two regiments was at Magdhaba. It appeared likely that this force consisted of the 1,600 infantry which had composed the garrison of El Arish, and that it was preparing to hold Magdhaba as a rearguard. Orders were given that a mounted force should push forward with all haste against the enemy, and arrangements were made accordingly by General Sir Charles Dobell for the move of most of the Australian and New Zealand mounted troops, with the Imperial Camel Corps, against Magdhaba and Abu Aweigila on the night of the 22nd-23rd. Major-General Sir H. G. Chauvel, K.C.M.G., C.B., was in command of the column.

8. Starting at 12.45 a.m. on December 23rd, the flying column halted at 4.50 a.m. in an open plain about four miles from Magdhaba, whence the enemy's bivouac fires could plainly be seen. General Chauvel, with his staff and subordinate commanders, immediately undertook a personal reconnaissance of the enemy's position, and soon after 8 a.m., by which time the first aeroplane reports had been received, the attack was set in motion.

The enemy had taken up a position on both banks of the Wadi el Arish, and was very strongly posted in a rough circle of from 3,000 to 3,500 yards diameter. Five large closed works, exceedingly well sited, formed the principal defences, and between these works was a system of well-constructed and concealed trenches and rifle pits.

General Chauvel's plan of attack was as follows:—

The New Zealand Mounted Rifles and Australian Light Horse, both under the command of Brigadier-General E. W. C. Chaytor, C.B., were to move to the east of Magdhaba and to swing round to attack the enemy's right and rear. The Imperial Camel Corps were to move direct against Magdhaba to attack the enemy in front—that is, from the north-west. Other Australian mounted troops were at the outset in reserve. Between 8.45 a.m. and 9.30 a.m. the attack developed, and at the latter hour General Chaytor moved a Light Horse Regiment and part of a Machine Gun Squadron on a wide turning movement round the rear of the enemy's position with orders to come in from the south. A little later two regiments of the New Zealand Mounted Rifles were despatched in more or less the same direction, though making a less wide detour, with orders to move on Magdhaba from the east. In the meantime the Imperial Camel Corps were making progress, though somewhat slowly.

At 10 a.m., the aircraft reports indicated the possibility that the enemy might try to escape. Thereupon General Chauvel ordered the mounted troops in reserve, less one regiment, to push in from the north-west. The troops moved forward at a trot, and, coming under shrapnel fire, increased the pace to a gallop. The enemy then opened a very heavy rifle and machine gun fire, whereupon the force

swung to its right and gained cover in the Wadi where, dismounting, it began an attack against the left of the enemy position.

Between noon and 1.30 p.m., the enemy's position was practically surrounded, but for some little time it had been found increasingly difficult to make progress. The horse artillery batteries had been greatly hindered by the mirage and the difficulty of getting forward observation, the ground round the enemy's position being absolutely flat and devoid of cover.

In the meantime reports were received from the Field Squadron that no water could be found. Unless Magdhaba could be taken during the day, therefore, it was probable that our troops would have to withdraw, as none of the horses had been watered since the evening of the 22nd, and the nearest water, except that in the enemy's position, was at El Arish. General Chauvel reported the situation to the Desert Column accordingly, and received orders to maintain the attack.

But before this communication arrived the situation had begun to improve. Some Australian mounted troops, pressing on against the enemy's left, captured a work on the west of the Wadi, taking about 100 prisoners. At 2 p.m. two regiments of the Australian Light Horse coming in from the north-east, were within 200 yards of the position, in close touch with the Imperial Camel Corps advancing from the north-west. A quarter of an hour later the attack of a third regiment of this force was pressing heavily on the enemy from the south. By three o'clock the New Zealand Mounted Rifles were within 600 yards of the enemy's trenches on the east.

From this time forward the pressure on the enemy increased from all sides. Before half-past three the force from the Wadi and the Imperial Camel Corps attacked the second line of the enemy's trenches, and at four o'clock the former carried one of the main redoubts, taking 130 prisoners, including the Turkish Commander. Immediately after this, part of a Light Horse Regiment charged in from the south, mounted and with fixed bayonets, and by half-past four all organised resistance was over, and the enemy was surrendering everywhere.

The total number of prisoners taken in this fine action was 1,282, including some 50 wounded. A large number of the enemy were buried by our troops on the position. Four mountain guns, one machine gun and 1,052 rifles were captured, and 200 more rifles were destroyed.

Our own casualties were 12 officers and 134 other ranks killed and wounded. It was possible to give every attention to our wounded before moving them back to El Arish, owing to the fact that the enemy had a permanent and well equipped hospital at Magdhaba, to which they were taken as soon as the action was over.

The troops marched back to El Arish during the night of December 23rd-24th.

9. On 27th December the Royal Flying Corps reported that an entrenched position was being prepared by the enemy at Magruntein, near Rafa. Work on this position was continued during the following day, and it was occupied by a garrison equivalent to about two battalions with mountain guns. It was not at the moment possible for me, owing to difficulties of supply, to push on and occupy Rafa permanently. Since, however, the enemy had